

Citizens Advisory Committee
Transition to Strong Mayor Form of Governance

Date: April 18, 2005
Attention: Mayor, Council Members, and Members of the Public
Subject: CAC Recommendations and Comments

The CAC is gratified to see the remarkable speedup by the city council over the past week in addressing several transition issues. Obviously, our committee takes its own message about urgency very seriously. We held our fifth meeting this past Friday and took part right afterwards in the public meeting organized by council staff. The discussion at both meetings was thoughtful and productive, although it became crystal clear that the devil will lie in the details of nearly every decision that must be made over the next several months.

Four major transition tasks have been docketed for today's hearing. Before diving into them, we have an important suggestion to make:

For the CAC the term "urgency" signifies the need for accelerated council action, but action that is based on well-analyzed information and proposals. The pressure on the Dewey Square Group is very great and they are doing a yeoman's job of responding, but members of the CAC are in the same predicament you are in when reports and consultant recommendations reach us at the very last minute, often too late to be of practical use.

To ease this problem, we would recommend that the Dewey Square Group coordinate more closely with the council offices and transmit their reports directly to the city council, along with a cc to the CAC. The council is Dewey Square's client, so this would be an appropriate request.

Now for today's docketed items: there is consensus that the position of **council presiding officer** requires a comprehensive public discussion to specify the responsibilities, method of selection, and tenure of the position, as well as budget implications of anticipated staffing needs for this new office. Selection of next year's presiding officer would best take place late in the transition process, after the conditions and terms of the position have been codified and after adoption of new permanent rules of council. This timing would avoid conflict between the transition efforts of the full council and political prerogatives of the future presiding officer.

There is also general agreement that we need a system to organize and shepherd the transition process throughout the year. Council has stated its intention to take on this responsibility collectively. Therefore, enabling measures should be created to establish a council transition working group, headed by a chairperson. Our understanding of present charter provisions tells us that the chairperson of a council transition committee could coordinate transition activities but not act as a spokesperson for other council activities. In this context, we also wish to clarify that members of the CAC do not support the concept of an interim presiding officer, as suggested in a recent council memorandum.

Moving on to the **office of legislative analyst**: at last week's council meeting we emphasized that the legislative success of our new city council will depend on the adequacy, impartiality, and quality of the information you receive about financial, land use, and all other city business. We strongly concur with Dewey Square's recommendation for an independent office of analysis, with separate (but interactive) budget and legislative branches. This would provide the city council as well as the public with an integrated, independent means of obtaining unbiased information, analyses, reports, and recommendations for intelligent decision-making.

The CAC also recommends that analysts report to the full council and take requests for work through a coordinating or senior analyst. This will help maintain the independence and impartiality of the office of analysis.

We feel that the consultants have underestimated the expected workload and consequently the staffing needs of this new office. It has come to our attention that the number of management staff who now work directly on budget matters totals approximately 24 and that at least half that number will be needed by the city council, which means 10-12 positions. In addition, 5-8 legislative analysts will be necessary to provide reports to the city council and to staff council committees. Since an equitable distribution of staff resources is mandatory if we are to ensure that all interests have equal standing in our new governmental system, we expect that these staffing needs will be met through a fair redistribution process.

As for **constituent services**: in a sense, the responsibility for constituent services has much in common with the responsibility for city planning. Both departments are subject to the legislative powers of the city council. In both cases, council members are held accountable by their constituents for the success or failure of these departments. And both are implemented through the administrative arm of government.

In the course of our discussions we heard several recommendations for returning the planning department to the jurisdiction of the city council, with the implementation arm of development services remaining under management. The CAC has not taken a position on this question, which will undoubtedly be discussed by the post-transition city council.

Similarly, the CAC takes no strong stand on constituent services. While the consultants offer general proposals for constituent services, we were most impressed by recommendations from council staff members, who expressed general satisfaction with the current system of coordinating constituent services between the city manager and council offices. We share their expectation that this system will continue to work satisfactorily under the new form of government, with council offices maintaining access to management staff, via the mayor.

We also learned that the city is in the early stages of developing for San Diego an improvement to constituent services in the form of a "311 system," a centralized process used successfully in many large and small cities. Since the 311 system appears to be a great improvement for the public and the city, we recommend maintaining our present system in anticipation of the timely development of a 311 system.

Finally, regarding the issue of **council committees**: the pressing need at this moment is to determine the anticipated budget requirements of next year's committee structure.

Given practical issues like the number of council members and the time available for committee meetings, the number of standing committees will necessarily be limited to a maximum of five. To satisfy budget-related time constraints, staffing estimates can be set now, in advance of a thorough review of a new committee system.

Full and informed discussions about council committees should be rescheduled for a future date as determined by a yet-to-be-created *complete* transition timeline – still a glaring and damaging deficiency in the transition process. A practical and obvious approach would be for current council committees to schedule workshops during their public meetings to discuss the identity, scope, and staffing of new and existing committees. Recommendations could then be brought to full council for action.

Obviously, certain decisions you must make about the committee structure are intertwined with decisions you will make about the scope and power of the presiding officer. Decisions about selecting committee chairs and members, as well as the number of members in a standing committee, will effectively determine the balance of power between the presiding officer and the remaining group of council members. These kinds of decisions will introduce us to a new set of political dynamics inherent in our fledgling mayor-council system. As we said earlier, the devil will lie in the details.

We will conclude today's report with three recommendations. First, although we keep pressing you to speed up, we also suggest you go slowly when making policy changes to systems that currently work sufficiently well. Come next year, the more familiar you are with council procedures and formats, the easier it will be to adjust to the major restructuring and dynamics that await you.

Second, it's an unavoidable fact that you will be making many policy and legislative changes under less than ideal circumstances. Some of your decisions will inevitably produce unintended consequences. Therefore, it is not too soon to begin thinking about establishing a monitoring system to kick in at the start of the new council era. Once the dust settles, the public will want a way of evaluating the system's effectiveness and a process to develop improvements. Right now, the CAC's highest priority is a smooth transition. Once that is accomplished, the city's highest priority must be public accountability.

And third, we cannot emphasize strongly enough our repeated concern about the lack of an expertly-drafted *complete* transition timeline, with associated deadlines. There are no ifs, ands, or buts: without a reliable timeline and deadlines, the chances for a successful transition process are next to zero.